

U.S. Military Academy - Warner House
Constitution Island, south shore, Hudson River
across from the U.S. Military Academy
U.S. Military Academy
West Point
Orange County
New York

HABS No. NY-5708-48

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY - WARNER HOUSE

LOCATION: Constitution Island, south shore, Hudson River across from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, Putnam County, New York.

USGS West Point Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.587600/4583700

PRESENT OWNER
AND OCCUPANT: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army. The house is unoccupied as a dwelling but is operated by the Constitution Island Association as a house museum.

PRESENT USE: Warner family museum.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Warner House is a museum interpreting the Warner family and their association with West Point, especially Susan and Ana Warner. The eighteenth-century house with its nineteenth-century additions has been restored on the interior with many original family pieces.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original section of the house is said to have been part of a 1782 Revolutionary War fieldstone barracks, based on maps which show such a structure near the present house site (Lange, McIntosh). To this earlier nucleus the Warners built an eastern addition in late 1837 or 1838 (Baker, McIntosh).
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The island upon which the Warner House sits, Constitution Island, was originally known as Martelaer's Rock and was part of an original British land grant to the Phillips (Philipse) family. Henry W. Warner purchased the island from Samuel Gouverneur and his wife (presumed heirs) on November 3, 1836 (Lange). Henry Warner covered his brother Thomas' deed of trust (1834) for the island and remained its owner (McIntosh). The house and island passed to daughters Susan Bogert Warner and Anna Bartlett Warner (possibly in 1875). William McIntosh notes that John Murray assumed his friend Henry Warner's debts in 1850, possibly holding the deed to the property until the daughters finally paid off the debt. In 1908 Constitution Island and the Warner House were bought by Mrs. Russell Sage and given to the U.S. Military Academy in 1909 in the name of herself and Anna B. Warner. A full account of this sale is found in Chapter 18 of Light in the Morning. Anna Warner continued living in the house until her death in 1915.

4. Builder: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: A small house existed on the island when Henry Warner moved his family there in 1838. The original house consisted of two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. The first addition was probably the one story lean-to kitchen on the north and then the dairy. The next addition was probably that of the two story kitchen. This house is variously described as a "farmhouse built on the ruins of the old fort" (McIntosh) and as the "caretaker's cottage for the Philipse estate" (Grashof). Based on Revolutionary War maps that show a barracks near the site of the house, the fieldstone wall of the original house is believed to have been part of this barracks.

The names "Wood Crag" (Baker), "Wood Craig" (footnote in Grashof) and "Plumbush Farm" (Baker) are associated with the house and property before the Warners acquired it. Mabel Baker writes of the Warner acquisition: "Henry Warner acquired Constitution Island...as a result of land speculation begun by his brother in 1834. Before becoming Plumbush Farm the property had been Fort Constitution, a Revolutionary War outpost from which the eastern stanchion of a great chain stretched across the river to West Point in an attempt to restrict British access through the Hudson. Separated from the mainland only by undrained marshes and having ample land for farming, the 'island' had considerable appeal to Thomas Warner who had visions of establishing a country estate on it from which he could supervise a luxury hotel and a number of resort cottages. He went so far as to have plans for such a complex drafted by Alexander J. Davis, but when the time came for him to sign the purchase contract he defaulted in favor of Henry who 'took the title of Plumbush Farm for my brother at his request, very much against my own particular desire.' There was a deed of trust executed to him." (Light in the Morning). The farm and property had a mortgage of \$48,093 in 1834-1836.

6. Alterations and additions: Mabel Baker writes in Light in the Morning of the first additions to the old house just before Henry Warner moved his family there from New York City in 1838: "to the original two main downstairs rooms which became the "old parlor" and the "old dining room," Henry added a larger parlor and dining room and his study. The original kitchen and milk-room were kept with the lean-to being used as a summer kitchen. He built a glazed piazza onto the new parlor which made a pleasant and informal sitting room with a grand view of the lawn and rocks sloping to the river and the mountains on the other shore. Henry kept the two original upstairs rooms as his own bedroom and the guest room. Three other rooms were added; two were small, known nowadays as Anna's room and Aunt Fanny's, and one was large with an alcove for a hip-bath. This room was Susan's and still has a magnificent four-poster bed in it. The rooms over the kitchen and buttery, known as the attics, were officially the servant's.

The house and its eastern additions can be seen on a map of West Point and Constitution Island in a Guidebook to West Point, published in 1844 by the Colton Company of New York (U.S.M.A. Special Collections).

B. Historical Context

The Warner House is historically significant not only for its association with West Point, but also for the literary reputations of its residents, Susan and Anna Warner. Henry Warner, father of Susan and Anna, and purchaser of the island, had been a successful attorney in New York City before moving his family to the island he purchased as a result of his brother Thomas' land speculation. The Reverend Thomas Warner was Chaplain of West Point and professor for about ten years (1828-1838). He was the first chaplain in the Chapel now known as the Old Chapel (H.A.B.S. NY-5708-7). Susan Warner was the author of 45 books, the most famous being The Wide, Wide World. Anna Warner also wrote books but is most remembered for the hymn "Jesus Loves Me." Both sisters were intimately associated with West Point, having taught bible classes to cadets for forty years. The books and articles listed in Part III give a much more detailed account of the Warners and their associations.

Constitution Island was initially associated with West Point during the Revolutionary War as the site of Fort Constitution and as the point from which the great chain was stretched across the Hudson River. For the overall context of Constitution Island and West Point see HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 2: "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy.

Today, the Warner House is operated as a museum to Anna and Susan Warner. It is interpreted as a nineteenth-century dwelling filled with the personal affects of the family.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Warner House is a good example of a late nineteenth-century farmhouse expanded through evolutionary growth into a larger dwelling, reflecting the lives of its occupants. The house is an example of early adaptive use since the west wall is believed to have been part of the Revolutionary War barracks for Fort Constitution. The house has been little altered from the mid-nineteenth century, without heating, plumbing and electricity, and reflects a modest level of architectural interior finish from that period.
2. Condition of fabric: The house appears to be in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building measures approximately 77' x 51' at its widest points. Excluding the enclosed porch and the western additions, the facade is composed of five bays. For the most part, the building is two stories; however, there are four, one story lean-to additions. There is no basement. The approximate dimensions of the various components are: original section (2 rooms), 21'-6" x 27'-6"; first kitchen, 12' x 17'; dairy, 8' x 17'; Warner addition 19'-6" x 28', dining room addition, 11'-6" x 20'; second kitchen, 18' x 18'; and the western lean-to addition, 12'-6" x 31'.

In overall appearance the house resembles four two-story gable-end buildings joined and held together by one-story lean-to sections that occur at the junctures.

2. Foundations: Foundation material could not be determined except for the original section which is fieldstone. The frame additions are most likely on stone foundations as well. The western addition is on posts.
3. Walls: Exterior wall finishes vary, consisting of random laid fieldstone, double German Siding, brick (running bond), vertical board-and-batten siding, and unbeaded weatherboards. With the exception of the stone section, all walls are painted white.
4. Structural systems: Structural systems are not visible but they are undoubtedly those common to the respective periods of frame construction: heavy timber framing for the original house and mill-sawn balloon framing for the later additions.
5. Porches, porte-cochère: There is one porch, on the facade, through which the house is entered. This enclosed porch is roughly 9' x 20' with three windows and a door on its south elevation and a double window of 20 lights each on its east side. The porch features wooden floor and a louvered door. A brick pad lies just east of the porch.

West of the gift shop room is a 33' wide roof supported by tree trunk posts that form a porte-conchère.

6. Chimneys: Five chimneys serve the house: two large brick chimneys rise above the stone wall of the original house, serving fireplaces that are part of that 3'-6" thick wall; a small square brick stove chimney at the exterior corner of the office and dining room; a square brick chimney that rises from the middle of the kitchen; and a square brick exterior stone chimney west of the dairy.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are seven exterior doors. The most significant is the principal door into the south room of the original section. This door is unusual because it is constructed with a double thickness for security, being panelled on the interior and sheathed on the exterior. The porch that leads to the front door has a louvered exterior door and a four panelled interior door. Other doors include a dutch door with a 12 light top on the north dining room wall; batten doors; a flat panelled door; and a half-panelled, half-glazed door. A doorway on the north of the kitchen at the second floor is now without its exterior porch and stairs; these can be seen in a historic photograph in the U.S.M.A. Archives (PL CI-a), reproduced in the Lange volume of this project.
- b. Windows: Windows are varied due to the many additions. Those in the earliest section are six-over-six light single-hung sash. The exception to this is a nine light wooden casement window, with a three light pointed arch transom, that occurs in the stone wall between the fireplaces. Including the dairy and north lean-to, all the windows of this early section are glazed with crown glass. Windows in the additions include six-over-six double-hung sash, a double eight light casement, a twelve light Dutch door, and fixed six light windows. The second floor windows are six-over-six light single-hung sash for the most part although the east addition has three-over-six light single-hung sash and there are assorted six light casements in the newest additions. Almost all windows have exterior shutters, both single or double louvered shutters and solid batten shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The house has three major gable roofs, a small gable roof, a large shed roof and three small shed roofs. All roofs are now covered with a strip composition material.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The roofs have slightly projecting overhangs and simple barge boards. Hung gutters and down conductors are found on most elevations.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See sketch plans included with the supplemental material.
2. Stairways: There are two stairways connecting the first and second floors: one in the oldest section of the house and one in the kitchen wing. The original frame stairway is a straight run enclosed by a wooden partition wall; it has a simple wooden handrail attached to the plaster wall and a simple wooden railing around the opening on the second. The service stairway in the northwest kitchen wing is also an enclosed straight run stair.
3. Flooring: All floors, with the exception of the dairy, are hardwood. These are original to the house and are mostly wide, butted edge-grain pine boards.

The dairy has a brick floor laid in a herringbone pattern.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most walls and ceilings are plaster. Exceptions include the "old sitting room" with a wooden wainscot of horizontal boards on the east wall; a board ceiling in the porch; wallpaper in the parlor; sheathed walls and ceiling in the gift shop; and board walls with exposed ceiling framing in the small room west of the dairy. The "old dining room" has a chairrail on its south wall; the upstairs rooms have chairrails almost flush with the walls. All rooms have a simple wooden baseboard.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All doorways have plain, simple architraves. The earliest doors, those between the "old sitting room" and "old dining room" and the door to Mr. Warner's bedroom are batten. Those leading into the parlor from these two rooms are panelled. The door from the "old dining room" to the museum is half glazed on top with twelve lights. With the exception of batten doors in the dairy, kitchen and gift shop, and two louvered doors upstairs, all other doors are flat panel doors painted white.
 - b. Windows: Interior window trim is simple, with plain wooden architraves. Due to additions, there are former exterior windows that are now on interior walls: the two south windows of the parlor and the north window of the "old dining room." Metal bars have been added to the interior of all principal windows.
6. Decorative features and trim: The architectural nature of the Warner House is that of a plain, vernacular house. Consequently, there is no decorative woodwork or trim. Built-in features of interest include a corner bookcase in the "old sitting room," a glazed corner cupboard in the dining room and shelves lining the sides of the dairy.
7. Hardware: Hardware is generally consistent with the period of the house. Batten doors are hung on wrought iron strap hinges; those doors on the interior also have wrought iron thumb latches. Later doors are hung on butt hinges and are secured by surface-mounted rimlocks. The exterior doors and the door to Mr. Warner's office have been fitted with wooden bars for added security.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Original sources of heat were four fireplaces in the oldest section of the house, a fireplace in the kitchen wing and, most probably, coal or wood burning stoves. The two downstairs fireplaces are without mantels, the one on the south having a stone around the opening. The south fireplace upstairs has lost its mantel. The only stove is in the fireplace in Mr. Warner's bedroom on the second floor. Stone chimneys indicate the use of other stoves. Remarkably, there is no other evidence of later heating systems.

- b. Lighting: The house apparently does not have electricity, relying on oil lamps for lighting.
 - c. Plumbing: There is no apparent plumbing. A cistern on the northeast corner of the kitchen catches rainwater from the gutters.
9. Original furnishings: The house is filled with nineteenth-century furniture. How much of this is original to the Warner family and how much was added during the 1950s restoration is unknown. Presumably the house was kept intact after Anna Warner died. Pieces of particular interest are the Gothic Revival bookcase, table and chairs in the parlor. An original Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington which hung over the fireplace in the "old sitting room" was donated to West Point and a copy put in its place.
- D. Site:
- 1. General setting and orientation: The Warner House sits on the south side of Constitution Island facing south towards West Point. The house is on a slight rise in a clearing surrounded by a grass lawn. A large tree which stood in front of the house has been cut down. This tree most likely shaded the house's southern exposure during the summer. Gravel walks have been installed around the house, connecting it to the outbuildings and river dock. A rocky outcrop to the southwest of the house is an excellent place from which to view West Point.
 - 2. Outbuildings: Associated structures include a dock (U.S.M.A. #1180) south of the house; two privies southwest of the house (U.S.M.A. #1181); a well (covered) north of the house (U.S.M.A. #1182); and two storage buildings north of the house (U.S.M.A. #1184 and 1185). One of the storage buildings is made of fieldstone (1185) and the other is of stone (two walls) and frame. Building #1184 was formerly used as a caretaker's residence.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: Measured floor plans exist and are in the Facilities Engineer's Office, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, U.S. Military Academy.
- B. Early views: Early photographs are in the Archives and Special Collections, U.S. Military Academy. Some of these are reproduced in the Lange and Grashof volumes of this project.
- C. Bibliography:
 - 1. Secondary and published sources:

Baker, Mabel. Light in the Morning: Memories of Susan and Anna Warner, West Point: The Constitution Island Association, 1971

. The Warner Family and the Warner Books, West Point: The Constitution Island Association, 1971.

The Constitution Island Association, Recollections of Miss Susan and Miss Anna Warner, N.D.

Grashof, Bethanie C. "Building Analysis and Preservation Guidelines for Category I and Selected Category II Buildings at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York." Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

Lange, Robie S. "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy." Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

McIntosh, William A. "From West Point to White River: The Warners and the Western Frontier," The Assembly, June 1982.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

The Constitution Island Association files, Highland Falls, New York.

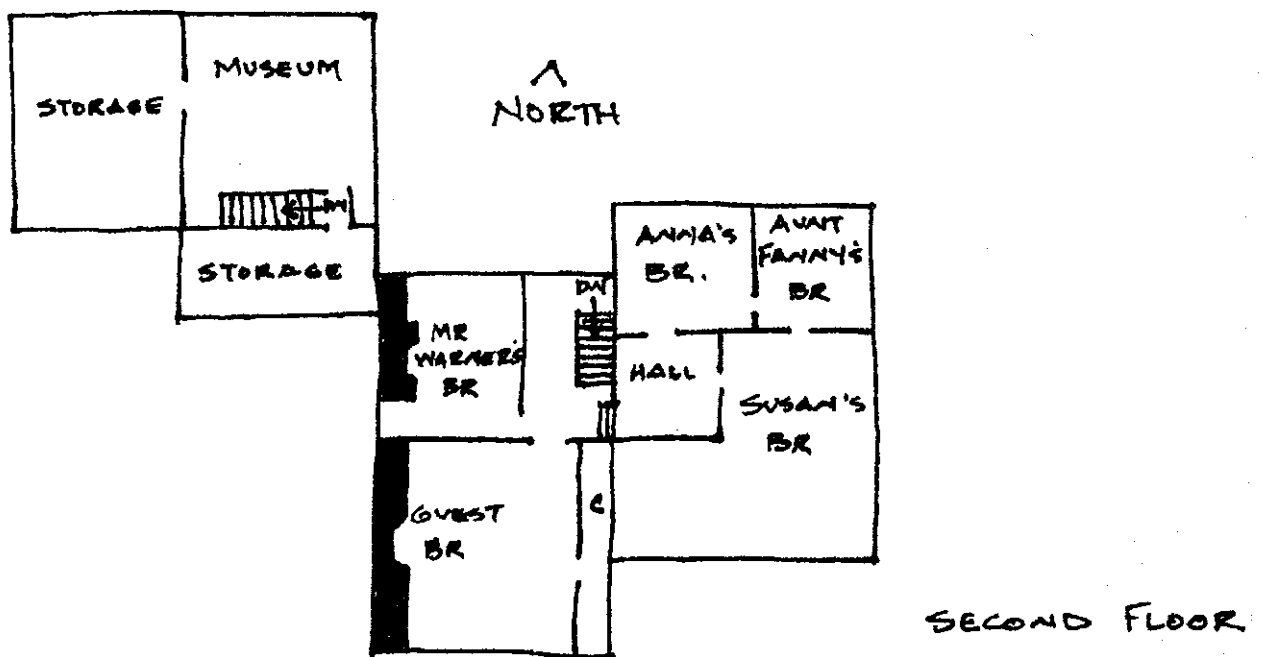
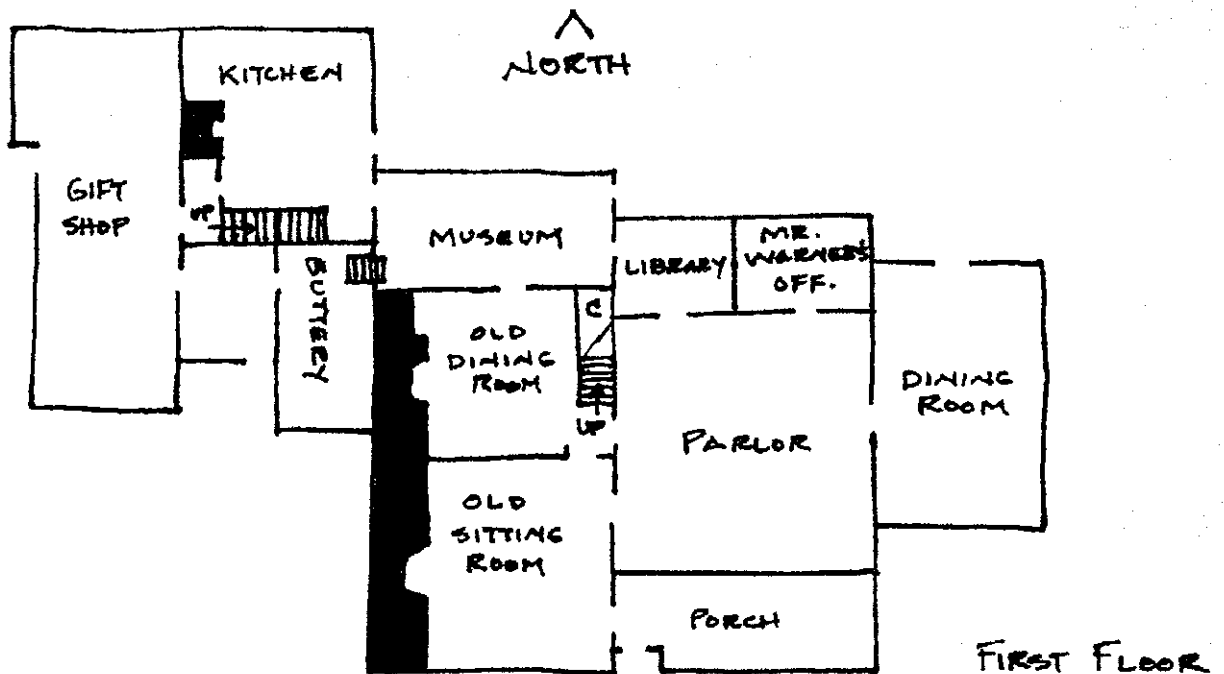
E. Supplemental Material:

1. Sketch plan

1. Sketch plan

WARNER HOUSE H.A.B.S. NY-5708-48

CONSTITUTION ISLAND
DRAWINGS NOT TO SCALE
T.C.M. 6/85



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation is part of a mutli-year project sponsored by the National Park Service and the United States Military Academy, explained in HABS No. NY-5708, Volume I, "Methodology. This written documentation was prepared by Travis C. McDonald, Jr., architectural historian, in 1982-1985 based on fieldwork conducted in 1982.

ADDENDUM TO:
U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY, WARNER HOUSE
(Building No. 1183)
Constitution Island
West Point
Orange County
New York

HABS NY-5708-48
NY, 36-WEPO, 1/48-

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